

Rev. L. Bacon, D. D.

New Haven Aug. 19. 1845.

New Haven 29 Aug 1845.

Rev. Amos A. Phelps,

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Dear Sir,

I have sometimes said "in my haste" that I would never write a word to an Abolitionist without being quite ready to print it, because the men of that class have so little conscience or delicacy about what is uttered in the carelessness of private correspondence or private conversation. But as you have, notwithstanding some hesitation, written so freely to me, I have concluded that I will write to you just what happens to be uppermost in my thoughts as my pen moves over the paper, confiding in you to make no unfriendly use of anything that I may say.

First then, I have to say that so far as I may have anything to do with the proceedings of the Board at the approaching session - so far as I may act or may contribute to direct the action of the meeting - there shall be no dodging. The question of Slavery shall be fairly & directly met so far as it can come legitimately before the body; or if it is not met, I will not be to blame for the failure.

In the next place, it is my present opinion ^{with us,} that the cooperation of the Southern Churches, in the Foreign Missionary enterprise, is not to be

asked for, & is in hardly any sense desirable. I do not see that we have any right to reject their spontaneous contributions; but the less we have to do in the way of cooperation with them, the better for them, the better for us, & the better for the common interests of Christianity.

Thirdly, I would hereafter appoint no slaveholder as a missionary. A conscientious & benevolent man who happens to have slaves in his power has no call to go to the heathen & leave those slaves to the tender mercies of Southern Society. And if he manumits them off to Illinois or to Canada, it is his duty to go with them & preach to them there rather than to go & preach to Arabs at Jerusalem. And besides, I do not see any reason why the right sort of a man for a foreign missionary, if born & brought up in South Carolina, is not of all others the man to do that work in South Carolina which no "foreigner" can do as well.

In the fourth place, the buying & selling of human beings for gain is a sin; but the buying of captives, with their own consent, from the hands of their oppressors, for the purpose of making them free is an act of charity. And if the captive, thus redeemed, comes under an obligation to repay either in labor or in the proceeds of his labor, that which is expended

for the purpose of making him free, the Redeemer of that captive does not thereby become a sinner. At the same time it seems to me that the funds of the Board given for its general objects ought not to be expended in that way.

Fifthly, I differ from the Abolitionists, clearly & positively, on the question of excommunicating slaveholders simply as such. That the Apostles were Abolitionists in the modern sense, I entirely deny. That there were slaveholders in the Apostolic Churches is to my mind perfectly plain. The power of Christianity will never be brought to bear against Slavery by excommunicating slaveholders eo nomine. You get no hold upon the slaveholder's conscience by attempting to do so.

Sixthly, As a Congregationalist, I would stand for the independence of the Churches gathered upon missionary ground. If I were a Presbyterian, I would stand for their responsibility to the proper ecclesiastical judicatories. As a missionary society we are to be careful how we assume 'lordship' over those Churches or any others. Over our missionaries we have just the power which the employer has over his employees. If we are dissatisfied with the manner in which they do the work for which we employ them, we may dismiss them from our service. Accordingly, if it shall be made to appear that any of them do not truly & thoroughly teach their converts that great Christian principle

~~if~~ "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them", the Board ought either to direct them how to do better, or disunite them from its service, as the case may seem to require.

Seventhly, my view of the manner in which Church discipline should be brought to act for the abolition of slavery is briefly this. If a Church member buys or sells men women or children, as merchandise, for gain, let him be dealt with as an offender. If having servants over whom the law makes him absolute in power, he does not provide as a Christian man for their welfare as rational & immortal beings - if he permits them to live together male & female in a brutal concubinage without using his power to establish & protect among them God's ordinance of marriage - if he restrains them from no wickedness except out of regard to his selfish interest, or what he regards as his property in them - if he is permitting them to live and die in heathenish ignorance - deal with him as an offender, & unless he repents let him be to you as a heathen & a publican. Deal with him not for the power which the law gives him over his neighbor to commit injustice, but for the actual wrong which he commits in the exercise of that power. Deal with him for distinct & palpable acts of oppression, & you have his conscience on your side, & not only his but the universal conscience of human nature. This kind of Church action would in a little while drive Slavery out of the Churches in Slaveholding

communities. So in regard to the communion of Churches. The resolutions which Mr. Dutton presented at our General Association last ~~summer~~^{June}, were drafted by me, I think that if I had been on the floor instead of being in the chair they would have been adopted. If a Church refuses to exercise discipline upon such offenses, that is a sufficient reason for other Churches, after admonition, to withdraw communion from that Church.

I have given you my views thus freely that you may judge what chance there is that my views & yours will harmonize on the points that are likely to come before the Board. If I understand the case, a Committee of which Dr. Woods is Chairman is to report upon some question concerning certain Choctaw or Cherokee Churches. That report, I dare say, is already written; & if Dr. Woods is not there in person it will be sent on with his signature. What it is, I shall have no means of knowing till it is read. Perhaps it will be satisfactory to all parties of reasonable men, though that is hardly to be expected. Should it be decidedly unsatisfactory to me, I shall be likely to move that the report be referred to another Committee. On such a Committee I should be very willing to act with you, or with any of the gentlemen whom you name, but especially with you and Mr. Seavitt, because you two have more logic in you, & more comprehension of principles, than the others, & because you two, if satisfied, would be more able than the others to

lead the minds of those whom you may be considered as representing.

The number of the Antislavery Reporter to which you refer, I suspect I have not yet seen. I commonly receive two ~~more~~ copies of that journal, which is one more than I need for my personal edification. But I have no recollection of having received the August number at all. It may have come while I was absent for a week about the first of the month, & may have been mislaid or destroyed with other newspapers before my return. Of course I write somewhat in the dark on those points in respect to which you refer me for information to that paper.

I will tell you now just where I think the great difficulty lies, & the only practical difficulty, in the way of harmonious action. Your associates, I apprehend, will be satisfied with nothing short of an implicit adoption & profession of what I understood to be the essential distinguishing doctrine of your Society and your Party (I do not mean your political ~~3~~ Party) to wit that the mere relation of master to one whom the law makes a slave is, ~~a sin~~ ^{a sin} in all cases, ^{on the part of the master} - so plainly & palpably a sin as to be ^{incompatible} ~~inconsistent~~ with a credible profession of Christianity. That is a doctrine which my reverence for the Scriptures will not permit me to adopt; and my view of the Scriptures as bearing on this point is the view of all

who do not agree with you. We must respect your conscientiousness in this matter; but you must respect ours. You must not charge us with being "pro-slavery," because on this point we do not see as you do; & we must not charge you with despising & dishonoring the New Testament. If then nothing will satisfy you but the adoption & profession of your doctrine on this point, the case is in my judgment quite hopeless. When conscientious men differ conscientiously, & neither of them can convince the other, the best thing they can do is to agree to differ.

I will only add that I am quite sure you misunderstand David Greene. There may be something in him of the "official hauteur" that you complain of - or rather he may have treated you & your friends with a want of confidence; but if there is any "Jesuitism" at the Missionary House, it is not in him. The difficulty is that there is just that difference between you & him, that there is between you & me. If upon consideration you can digest my views as I have laid them down on the first sheet of this letter, & can come to any accommodation upon the basis of those views, I think you may be sure there will be no difficulty with him.

I have written very plainly; but I have no doubt you will receive all that I have written as uttered in a friendly spirit. I have tried to come directly to the point; for that is the truest friendliness.

I have no time for palavering. Of that, I am afraid,
there will be more than enough in Dr. Wood's report.
It is because I acknowledge heartily & kindly the
confidence towards me which your letter implies,
that I reciprocate that confidence by writing so freely
to you. May God guide us, & all concerned, to
such decisions as shall be for his glory - such as
shall tend to the relief & deliverance of the oppressed,
& to the triumph of the Gospel.

Yours truly,

Leonard Bacon.